

## POETRY

The links between Branscombe and Beer crop up throughout recorded history. What went on before that though we can only guess. John Torrance has written a poem that tells of a boulder between the two villages that might have acted as a marker and is now perhaps a keeper of past secrets...

### ***Wayside Boulder*** ***(by John Torrance)***

Wayside boulder, a silent echo  
of purposes we cannot know.

It's on the shortest route to Beer  
from Branscombe Mouth, that much is clear.

Farmers drove their plough-teams up  
this clattering track to fields on top

and hollowed out for building-stone  
these quarry-pits long overgrown.

Here excisemen and smugglers played  
tough games of stealth and ambushade.

Before Beer boys were called 'Beer dabs'  
or Branscombe boys, 'pretty little lads',\*

did Branoc's people trudge up here  
to work for a Roman overseer? \*\*

Or perhaps much earlier immigrants  
first blazed the trail in search of flints,

the hard black flint of Beer. Might they  
have placed this rock to mark the way?

I speculate, but at my side  
the boulder's silence warns my pride

this world we think we know so well  
holds secrets it will never tell.

\* 'Seaton scabs and Beer dabs  
But Branscombe boys are pretty little lads.'

This local rhyme contrasts Beer as a fishing village with Branscombe as a farming village. Also, because the manor of Branscombe was run by the canons of Exeter cathedral in the Middle Ages, tenants' younger sons could apply to be educated for the priesthood.

\*\* Evidence of a Romano-British farm has recently been unearthed above Beer, and Beer quarry caves were opened up by the Romans. 'Bran' in the name Branscombe is thought to be a Celtic personal name, possibly 'Branoc'.